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Ex-combatant Agency and Re-recruitment

Sukanya Podder¹

Abstract

Previous research on ex-combatant re-recruitment into armed violence has focused on the role of structures and facilitating conditions but has overlooked the question of individual agency and choices. The paper fills this gap in the literature by presenting an original typology of ex-combatant agency drawing on Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory. Four types of agency, namely tactical, rational, reflective and moral are identified as corresponding with key characteristics of human agency namely: self-reactiveness, forethought, self-reflectiveness and intentionality. These interact with multiple enabling and inhibiting factors to shape ex-combatant decision-making. Premised on such a conceptualization, at least six types of choices are observed through a process of conceptual scoping that allow structure and agency to be considered in tandem. A critical engagement with disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) as a security practice exposes the problems with core terminologies and the politics surrounding the militarisation and demilitarisation of children and youth. It advances a critical security studies agenda in the study of ex-combatant reintegration.

Key words: Reintegration, Agency, Ex-combatants, Child Soldiers

Introduction

DDR programmes attempt to dismantle militant organisations, and facilitate a return to civic life for erstwhile combatants. To date, DDR projects have been attempted in diverse contexts ranging from El Salvador, Cambodia, Mozambique, Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Sudan among others. Ex-combatants for the most part are conceptualized as a problem in need of reintegration. The danger of a return to violence is cited as the main reason for targeted donor assistance. Approached through a framework of assistencialism, ex-combatants become passive recipients of programmes they do not contribute to in terms of their content or duration. Ex-combatant decision-making in itself is equally assumed to be inadequate or inconsequential to the larger dynamics of conflict relapse. This research is

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pursued in direct response to this gap in the literature. It departs from previous studies that have mostly focused on the role of structures and the facilitating conditions for ex-combatant re-recruitment. Instead, a study informed by critical social inquiry is pursued to explore the different choices available to ex-combatants outside of the limits of reintegration and re-recruitment.

The aim here is to recover, and provide a more nuanced understanding of agency as a determinant of ex-combatant re-recruitment. The research follows a post-linguistic approach to security, by critically analyzing the processes and mechanisms of meaning production in the study of ex-combatant reintegration. It engages with DDR as an important security practice, and with ex-combatants and child soldiers as objects of this practice. By problematizing their role as targeted recipients without voice or agency, and the underlying normative dichotomies around categorising children and youth as security threats in the global South, the paper speaks to CSS's fundamental concern with 'the politics of security' and advances the concept of 'winners and losers' associated with particular understandings and practices of DDR.

In keeping with the ethnographic turn in critical security studies (CSS), the research acknowledges concerns with objectivity and bias in analyzing empirical studies around ex-combatants and child soldiers. Mats Utas (2008) notes that research on ex-combatants draw on results from short-term fieldwork, or from quantitative approaches, with access to respondents arranged through humanitarian organisations. The problem with such approaches lie in that, they elicit responses in victim modes, thereby concealing important aspects of their lived experience. In Utas and Susan Shepler's (2005) work on child soldiers, appeal to, and projection of this victim image, has been analysed as a form of tactical manipulation of cultural and economic capital. On the one hand 'victimcy' or victim agency, appeals to the normative and cultural ideas about childhood in the global North. On the other hand, it allows such groups to avail of humanitarian aid packages as a form of economic support. The overall result is a skewed representation of agency. One that is either overly weak or dangerously harmful.

To mitigate these concerns, the research takes a pragmatic reflexive approach for reappraising multi-site empirical research and findings around ex-combatant lives. It engages with key normative and practical criteria used to categorise reintegration outcomes, and urges the use of social cognitive approaches to extend theorization around ex-combatant agency in ways that allow structure and agency related factors to be considered in tandem. While there can be no singular model for understanding how individual actors manoeuvre their way through

diverse post-conflict environments, such an approach allows us to at once question, passivity and victimization frameworks while qualifying the scope of agency as an exercise in unlimited choice (Aretxaga, 1997: 61).

Begona Aretxaga's research about the political tactics of nationalist women during the 1970s in Belfast, Northern Ireland advanced a similar idea of 'choiceless decisions'. From a post-structuralist feminist position, using interpretive anthropological methods, Aretxaga revealed how women in Catholic or nationalist districts of Belfast organised themselves into street committees and led popular forms of resistance against the policies of the government of Northern Ireland and after its demise, against those of the British. These hitherto invisible practices were an integral part of the social dynamic of the conflict and had important implications for the broader organisation of nationalist forms of resistance and gender relationships. Such an ethnographic framing is particularly valuable here, as it allows the agency of ex-combatants to be conceptualized as one of limited choice.

The article is primarily an exercise in conceptual scoping. The first part discusses existing structural and individual level explanations on ex-combatant re-recruitment advanced in the literature on civil wars, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) and ex-combatant reintegration. The second part draws on insights from social cognitive theory, especially Albert Bandura's work on human agency to develop a four-pronged typology of ex-combatant agency as a deductive theory. Six possible choices based on the analysis of agency are developed to highlight the possible applications of agency outside of a reintegration and re-recruitment spectrum. To understand how agency and choices relate and the structural influences that shape this interaction, six types of enabling and inhibiting factors are considered in the next part, followed by a concluding discussion.

A note on terminology and scope is warranted. While the focus here is on ex-combatants as a social category, the research is mindful of the fact that this group is far from homogenous. Factional differences, contrasting political ideologies and social networks, along with divergent conflict related experiences could create different barriers to socialisation, stigma, mistrust and harmful stereotypes in a given context. For example, in the case of Sierra Leone, the experiences of ex-Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and ex-Civil Defence Force (CDF) fighters were not the same. This issue of contextual variation does not adequately inform DDR policies however. Standardization of DDR templates has resulted in underemphasizing the contrasting values or approaches to militarising youth.

Similarly the concepts of recruitment, reintegration and re-recruitment vary considerably depending on one's location in the global political economy. While the global North celebrates the coming of age of adolescents by encouraging them to take up gap year challenges as a taster to a military career, donors and humanitarian actors mourn the loss of innocence through activism around banning child soldier recruitment in Africa (Lee-Koo, 2011: 725). These normative assumptions filter into responses around reintegration as well. In the global South, symptomatic of the collapsed social order into which integration is attempted the need for reform and a therapeutic restoration to childhood is mandated (Macmillan, 2009: 36). In contrast, in the global North, military service is viewed as a panacea to youth gun and knife crime, to deter young boys and teens from deprived socio-economic backgrounds from joining disorganised forms of gang violence (Basham, 2011: 175-176). While in the global North certain groups of children and youth are viewed as a social problem, in the global South, ex-combatant youth and child soldiers are viewed as security threats, prone to erupt into violence, and in need of paternalistic policies that keep them busy, engaged or employed to discourage recidivism into future conflicts or crime. As a result, the discourse around ex-combatants becomes a bounded category, where only certain subjects, narratives and theories are admitted.

Ex-Combatant Re-Recruitment: Structural and Individual Explanations

Recent literature on DDR has addressed the question of ex-combatant re-recruitment in the context of the failure to reintegrate. Most studies set up the reintegration-re-recruitment relationship as an either/or outcome. The main assumption is that when reintegration is unsuccessful it can lead to violent and criminal outcomes. Problems with access to reintegration support, unemployment, or broader flaws with DDR are also cited as possible factors (Themnér, 2013: 321-323). Jaremeý McMullin suggests that, in Sierra Leone, the reintegration programme facilitated re-recruitment. Recruiters capitalized on ex-combatant anger at reintegration delays, and exclusion from DDR lists drawn up by commanders. They paid ex-combatants 500 United States dollars (USD) and promised them the opportunity to loot (2013a: 181). The feeling of not doing well out of DDR in Sierra Leone, therefore justified them rejoining the Liberian conflict to gain further reintegration benefits.

Reintegration into poverty, limited job opportunities and experiences of re-marginalization are further arguments supporting the possibility of ex-combatant recidivism (McMullin, 2004). Post-war societies present enormous problems of reconciliation and broader mistrust among previously warring groups. Ex-combatants in particular may feel stigmatized and excluded both in their communities of return and within the political arena. These tendencies

result in social re-marginalization and feelings of powerlessness among ex-combatants (Utas, 2005: 137-154). They also result in limited employment opportunities especially in the formal sector. Ex-combatants may find reliance on and working or living with wartime associates often the best possible route to survival. Operating within wartime social networks however can create access into a range of illegal and informal, security, political, and criminal activities that capitalize on ex-combatants pre-existing skills, thereby reinforcing the need to either remain militarized or motivating a return to arms (Rozema, 2008: 423-452; Theidon, 2009: 1-34; Maringira, 2015: 72-87).

In addition to the identified structural-level triggers, there are a host of individual level explanations that have been advanced. Ex-combatants are likely to engage in violence because of certain personal characteristics. For example, if they are recruited at an early age, they can lack the education, training and skills required to compete in the labour market (Blattman and Annan, 2010: 882-898). Their security situation may be precarious, often targeted by security forces, local communities; and spoiler groups in revenge attacks or due to hostility related to wartime deeds (Themnér, 2013: 303). Rejoining armed groups can become a route to self-protection in such cases. In other instances, ex-combatant dissatisfaction with post-conflict outcomes can create disappointment and resentment, fuelling recidivism. For example, rewards such as official recognition, government jobs, pensions and financial rewards promised at the time of disarmament may not always follow through (Schafer, 1998: 207-222). The non-distribution of promised credits and land in El Salvador, the lack of access to land in post-DDR Uganda, and problems with pensions in Bosnia-Herzegovina are some selective examples where dissatisfaction led to riots by ex-combatant groups (See, Collier, 1994: 343-351; King, 2000: 329-333).

The mental health of individual combatants can affect their willingness to disarm. Living in a constant state of anxiety can result in developing a stress response mechanism that invokes aggression, anger or fear (Banholzer, 2013: 332). The experience of chronic violence can have other negative impacts as well. Survey evidence from Sierra Leone, Liberia, Northern Uganda and Colombia suggests that individuals' who did not return to communities where they lived before the war, exhibited greater difficulty gaining acceptance socially (Arjona and Kalyvas, 2006; Pugel, 2006; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007). In contrast, ex-combatants that find positive experiences in combatant lifestyles such as status, money, followers and friends are predicted as more likely to rejoin (Theidon, 2009: 1-34). Becoming a civilian may not always be a priority partly because civilians do not understand the experiences of ex-combatants (Hinojosa, 2010: 179-194).

Finally contextual variation is an important consideration in explaining divergent reintegration trajectories. The context into which American veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan reintegrate is markedly different from that of sub-Saharan Africa. DDR programmes are mostly attempted in poor post-conflict states where economic opportunities are non-existent, and reintegration into poverty is linked to the broader condition of state failure. Yet in recent times, scholars such as David Keen, argue that since the 2007 global financial crises, even in America, many lack access to healthcare, basic education, food security and experience pockets of state failure recreating conditions that can trigger recidivism due to socio-economic marginalization (Keen cited in McMullin, 2013b: 65).

Limits of Current Explanations

These arguments are not foolproof. There is limited evidence that DDR related economic rehabilitation assistance makes ex-combatant beneficiaries more likely to reintegrate politically and socially. Survey results from Burundi suggest that while the DDR programme reduced poverty levels among beneficiaries, economic gains did not result in greater political and social integration (Gilligan, Mvukiyehe and Samii, 2013: 599). In earlier studies, Humphreys and Weinstein found participants in the Sierra Leone DDR programme, not better reintegrated than non-participants (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007: 533). In Liberia, however, James Pugel found that participants in the DDR were more successful in reintegrating than non-participants (2006: 6). Scholars also find the impact of DDR limiting, given that large number of ex-combatants self-demobilize (de Vries and Wiegink, 2011: 38-51). Reintegration programmes are rarely able to capture the entire pool of combatants, and increasingly civilians can cheat their way into DDR programmes (Munive and Jakobsen, 2012: 359-385).

There is also a lack of consensus on the definition of reintegration success. Most studies differ as to how they define reintegration success. Success can mean economic reintegration, political inclusion, social acceptance by communities, or a sum of all these attributes (Kriger, 2003: 17-22). Most large-scale surveys with ex-combatants differ in their sampling strategy. Apart from sampling both participants and non-participants in DDR, there are selected measures of reintegration performance to be had. These can range from employment/income, community acceptance, democratic orientation, to affiliation with wartime networks for example. There is no standard design as to which attributes are chosen in any particular research or evaluation. As a result, often the percentage of ex-combatants that participate in DDR versus the actual percentage of ex-combatants that successfully reintegrate can vary greatly.

In Sierra Leone, Humphreys and Weinstein suggest that 86 percent of their sample had broken ties with their factions, 84 percent were employed, 62 percent expressed confidence in electoral politics and 93 percent felt accepted, although ex- RUF reported more problems of acceptance compared to ex-CDF (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007: 542-543). An ex-post evaluation of reintegration performance in Sierra Leone however suggests that 80-88 percent of trained ex-combatants were socially and economically integrated, and only 60 percent were employed (GIZ, 2010: 8). Besides this, there are inherent problems with identifying the actual composition of former combatants that are re-recruited, as there is often no reliable data available to verify who was re-recruited, when and into which types of armed groups or conflicts (Mitton, 2013: 321-337; Mutengesa, 2013: 338-356).

Arguments about ex-combatant socialization through wartime networks as inherently negative or violence generating does not hold true in all cases. Evidence from DRC and the Republic of Congo (RoC) on ex-combatant trade associations, while acknowledging the continuity between wartime and peacetime leadership roles and patterns, emphasize how trade associations of ex-combatants were particularly conducive to reintegration (Lemasle, 2012). The case of Bike Riders' associations in Sierra Leone provides another example of this trend (Peters, 2007: 16).

Similarly, the assumption that ex-combatants especially child soldiers are pre-disposed, vulnerable or susceptible to mobilization is also difficult to co-relate in practice. Recent scholarship suggests that ex-combatants shared memory of abuse can inoculate an entire generation against renewed hostilities (Mitton, 2013). Even with youth that have been forcibly recruited there is little evidence of aggression (Annan et al. 2009). Hill, Taylor, and Temin's 2008 survey data on whether ex-combatants in Lofa county, Liberia would fight again found that two-thirds of Liberian ex-combatants would never go back to war. Another 2008 Monrovia based survey found that only 2 of 466 young ex-combatant respondents said they would join an armed group if fighting were to resume and only one said he would join a conflict in a neighbouring country (Hill et al. 2008; Bøås and Hatløy, 2008: 51).

Scholars such as McMullin, Mitton and de Vries and Wiegink among others have criticized the securitized logic justifying DDR as a form of an antidote to the threat from ex-combatants (de Vries and Wiegink, 2011; McMullin, 2013a; Mitton, 2013). By explaining that re-recruitment is likely to be high when ex-combatants fail to reintegrate economically, policy makers reduce reintegration success to finding employment. Studies however find a negative co-relation between unemployment and violence (Berman et al., 2011: 496-528).

To reduce reintegration to economic outcomes is to deny ex-combatants a great deal of agency in being able to frame the choices that they understand themselves. At the same time, the question of ex-combatants in post-conflict societies as capable of agency assumes that they are not mere victims of circumstances and structures that they did not create or control. While ex-combatants as all other subjects can possess some degree of choice, and some capacity to act, it has to be qualified because ‘the agency of those in power is very different from that of those subjugated to power and dominance’ (Shaw, 2002: 19). In seeking a more nuanced approach the following section examines the underpinnings of ex-combatant agency before developing a four-pronged typology that guides the analysis on agency, choices and possible outcomes.

Ex-Combatant Agency: A New Typology

In the literature on conflict participation, combatant agency has been variously conceptualized. Using Long’s definition, Peters (2004) defines agency in post-conflict contexts as ‘the capacity to process social experiences and to devise ways of coping with life even under the most extreme forms of coercion’ (Long, 1992: 22-23; Peters, 2004: 7). Alcinda Honwana nuances this further through a distinction between tactical and strategic agency (2005: 31-52; 2006: 71; 1999: 4-13). The first is narrow and opportunistic, and exercised to cope with concrete, immediate conditions of their lives in order to maximize the circumstances created by their environment. The latter is based on a position of power that enables a certain degree of control over the self and the decisions taken. It is an agency of a longer time frame, where events and actions can be planned and are not only determined by random factors they could neither predict nor control (ibid).

Scholars such as Henrik Vigh, Danny Hoffman, Mats Utas, Morten Bøås, Krijn Peters and Myriam Denov among others note that the tactical nature of ex-combatant life and thereby their agency has important implications not only for the kind of resources available but also how these are approached and defined (Utas, 2003; Vigh, 2006; Peters, 2007; Bøås, 2013; Denov, 2011; Hoffman, 2011). Resources here refer to the material base of actions including original skills, knowledge, network and alliances (Hagmann and Péclard, 2010: 547). Hoffman notes that the implications of agency are more intriguing in the case of children and youth (2003: 302). Agency appears as a misplaced analytical category in the context of western discourses that promulgate the popular image of a hapless, corrupted child conscripted into combat by coercion. Popular discourses make political distinctions meant to imply relative agency and apportion blame in ways that imply a lack of agency for children

and the opposite for youth (Utas, 2003: 29). When acknowledged, the agency of child soldiers is taken to be morally neutral yet capable of tremendous harm (Hoffman, 2003: 302-303).

There is a need to study ex-combatant rationality and sense making in post-conflict societies through a deeper analysis of specific (local) circumstances and of subsequent choices and actions in individual cases. While diving deeper into the ethnographic particulars of the individual cases is outside the scope of the current piece, as a first step towards broadening the agency of ex-combatants, I develop a typology of agency as a deductive theory. Efforts to develop theories of human agency are not new. Theorists of practice such as Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens have examined the role of habitus and routines, rational choice theorists have emphasised purpose, communication based and some feminist theories have underlined the role of judgment and sociologists such as Emirbayer and Ann Mische have disaggregated agency across interactional, practical-evaluative and chordal triads (1998: 968-971). Others such as Hitlin and Elder have focused on the time horizon to identify variants of human agency along existential, identity, pragmatic and life course dimensions (2007: 171).

The typology of ex-combatant agency developed here draws on theoretical insights from social cognitive theory, rarely used in studies on ex-combatant reintegration. In the social psychology field, multiple contributions of agency and its dimensions exist (See, Clauser, 1991; 1993; Alexander, 1992; 1993 among others). I draw on Albert Bandura's research, given that it is less dismissive of context, an important element in ex-combatant behavior.

Agency is conceived here as the ability to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances (Bandura, 2001: 1-26; Bandura, 2006:164-180). Four core properties of human agency structure individual choices and decisions within a social field. The first is intentionality. Intentions include plans and strategies; they involve actions to realize them both individually and in interaction with others. The second is forethought. It involves visualizing futures and anticipating outcomes. The third is self-reactiveness. It entails the ability to construct an appropriate course of action to motivate and regulate their execution. The fourth is self-reflectiveness. It represents a metacognitive capability to reflect upon oneself and the adequacy of one's thought and action (Ibid). While beliefs about how one should pursue their values or goals can determine actual behaviors, often intentions and values may or may not translate into actions and choices (Swidler, 1986: 273-286). This is because most ex-combatants make choices under some level of constraints. While this does not remove their agency and their ability to evaluate alternative coping strategies it does present nuances into how agency operates.

Bearing these in mind, it is possible to classify ex-combatant agency into four categories, namely, tactical, rational, moral and reflective (Figure 1). Each type correlates with a corresponding element of human agency discussed earlier. *Tactical agency* correlates with ‘self-reactiveness’. It is responsive and fluid in character in that it makes use of opportunities as and when they arise. As a result it does not entail a great deal of strategic foresight or considered choice making. It helps individuals tackle situations that demand immediate responses, with results of their choices forthcoming in the short term. For ex-combatants, the post-conflict situation resembles a day to day analogue movement that creates an agency that by necessity becomes tactical and concentrates on the immediate, as strategic long term agency can be ill-afforded or is difficult to realize (Bøås, 2013: 612). Tactical agency enables ex-combatants to make choices that can maximize their opportunities under difficult circumstances (Peters, 2004: 30-31). Hoffman’s analogy of war as work, defines the decision to re-enlist as a ‘just in time mode of political, social and economic production’ (Hoffman, 2012: 48, 52). Mobile willing youth had their skills for violence on sale in the political market place and reacted to opportunities for work without much analysis of the long-term outcomes of such a choice.

[Table 1 here]

Rational agency is similar to forethought. It includes a cost-benefit analysis of future outcomes through current deliberation about the results of prospective actions. It involves an element of self-regulation in conjunction with deliberative ability and, therefore, assumes the ability to construct appropriate courses of action and to execute the same. It highlights the ability or intention of the individual to influence one’s functioning and life circumstances. The valued attributes of rationality are rooted in the ability to self-organize, self-regulate and self-reflect. Rational agency performs within a given set of historical circumstances and can vary at different times and places (Mkandawire, 2002: 189, 191). What might appear rational at a particular point in time can be less or more costly at a different point. In most cases ex-combatants are likely to morally judge based on intuition, with rationalization of their decision likely to follow after the act (Pearce, 2013). Nichole Argo argues that rational choice operates differently depending on whether the self or communal orientated motivations are predominant. In case of self-orientated motivation, rationality is driven by consequentialist concerns regarding ends rather than means (2009: 654-655).

In the literature, failure of the economic dimension to reintegration is viewed as the primary cause of ex-combatant recidivism, which in turn is tied to greed-based explanations for civil war recurrence (Collier and Hoeffler, 2009: 1-27). Opportunistic ex-combatants are likely to

be attracted to mercenary activity in pursuit of material gains. With communal oriented motivations, rationality is premised more on deontological concerns regarding the means rather than the ends (Argo, 2009). This makes the latter value oriented and driven by commands or demands that derive from ethical, religious, and social belief systems linked to the community. Religious or ideological fervor can produce re-recruitment via a rational calculus, in which martyrdom itself is a goal and the risks involved considered rational (Weinstein, 2004).

The essence of *moral agency* relates to the idea of a moral compass that draws on the concept of the moral self. It describes an interior psychological state that is integral to the definition of the self (Noam and Wren, 1993). Moral agency has a strong individual quality. It aligns with positive intentions to take actions that can mitigate previous misdeeds. In the context of ex-combatant reintegration processes, the practice of spiritual purification through the performance of traditional cleansing rituals are examples of how moral agency of the individual responds to social understandings of good versus evil (Honwana, 2002; 2005). Reassertion of intrinsic values can be triggered by life changing experiences such as death, loss and injury. It can also be a product of experiencing wrongdoing from close quarters, thereby triggering a renewed sense of choosing between right and wrong actions. Feelings of regret about past actions can offer the first steps towards accepting responsibility for wrongdoing. Admitting to one's mistakes can present opportunities for reconciling with normal expectations around individual conduct. Moral agency can assist with the process of adopting non-violent, socially appropriate modes of behaviour that enable ex-combatants to succeed in the economic and social dimensions of reintegration.

Reflective agency manifests through the exercise of metacognitive ability. It is closely related to moral agency in that the issue of beliefs and value systems are linked to the property of self-reflectiveness. It involves a functional self-awareness, i.e., the ability to reflect on personal actions, thoughts, and the repercussions of or the inherent value of one's actions. It also includes the ability to consider corrective measures in recognition of wrongdoing. The latter can evoke feelings of moral redemption and, in extreme cases, encourage the practice of physical self-punishment. Ex-combatant's willingness and ability to transition into civilian livelihoods is premised on their ability to reflect on and realize the implications of their role for the self and society both in its positive and negative aspects. Lessons drawn from being manipulated, or cheated by those in authority can pave the way for understanding the costs of complicity in the actions of others without adequate protection of both self and values. This ability to exercise moral self-judgment and to reflect on past actions can encourage ex-

combatants to align future or planned action with stronger moral values and non-violent life-paths that encourage reintegration.

Ex-Combatant Choices: Six Possible Paths

Based on the discussion about agency, ex-combatants can exercise various types of agency to choose reintegration, re-recruitment or something else. At the same time, it is difficult to draw a straight line between individual choices and the divergent outcome of reintegration and re-recruitment. Several possible paths can exist. For example, ex-combatants may not be fully reintegrated into civilian livelihoods but this does not entail that they will necessarily be re-recruited or that re-recruitment cannot be reversed in favor of desertion. In pursuing a more nuanced approach, it is possible to identify the different choices available to ex-combatants and relate these to the different types of agency identified. For analytical purposes, the focus here is limited to *six* types of choices. The selection of possible choices is based on available empirical findings around ex-combatant lives and livelihoods in post-conflict societies.

The first choice is “Reintegration into civilian life without DDR support”. Self-reintegration without partaking in a formal DDR programme is one possible outcome. The reasons for self-reintegration can be various. The most common is the desire for anonymity linked to the fear of discrimination or political targeting (Peters, 2007: 12-14). Self-reintegration is pervasive among female ex-combatants. Most serve in support roles, and find it difficult to prove their active participation through the surrender of a weapon (Mazaruna, McKay, Carlson and Kasper, 2002: 116-119). In other cases, fear of stigma can make women view DDR participation as counterproductive to their reintegration (Bouta, 2005: 7). In Northern Uganda, the most common form of reintegration among female abductees was participation in a traditional cleansing ceremony followed by receiving amnesty, registering at a reception center and receiving a reinsertion package (Betancourt et al., 2014: 4). Another possibility in relation to non-participation is formal demobilization followed by dropping out of the DDR programme. In the decade long multi-country Great Lakes DDR programme, where 300,000 combatants demobilized in seven countries, nearly 20 percent did not subsequently claim any reintegration benefits (MDRP, 2010: 24).

The second choice is “Reintegration into civilian life with DDR support”. Across a range of countries where DDR programmes have been launched, many thousands have officially demobilized (Zena, 2013: 4). Participation rates vary depending on the context and content of the programme. Despite shortcomings, there is some evidence of successful reintegration as a result of DDR participation. In Burundi, for instance, ex-combatants demonstrated weak

motivation for re-recruitment, and readily took part in the DDR (Uvin, 2007: 11). Participation in DDR programmes however does not necessarily translate into individual success stories. In Sierra Leone, Humphreys and Weinstein estimated that nearly seven percent of demobilized fighters experienced severe problems with reintegration, and that this pool of nearly 5,000 unintegrated fighters were a threat to stability and susceptible to re-recruitment by violence entrepreneurs (2007: 542).

This situation can give rise to a third possibility, namely, “Participating in DDR, re-recruited but not unintegrated”. Ex-combatants integrated into powerful militarized networks that are explicitly political are likely to be re-recruited. Moving individuals from active members of a warring group into citizens that are willing to participate in peacetime politics requires transformation of prior attitudes. Individuals integrated into insurgent groups must be integrated into alternative political institutions and networks to prevent remobilization into armed political or economic formations. For example in DRC, while an approximate 200,000 combatants were processed through the first round of national DDR, half were re-mobilized into security related vocations (MRDP, 2010: 3). Others were integrated into armed groups protecting the artisanal mining industry in the north and south Kivus controlled by members of the Congolese national army (Global Witness, 2011; Gimba, 2015: 13).

The fourth choice is “Participation in DDR, unintegrated, but not re-recruited”. The identity of ex-combatants linked to DDR participation can create an artificial separation, one that inhibits’ true integration (McMullin, 2013b, 233). The ex-combatant identity card carries and contains affective energies that are put to use in specific webs of social relations and that link the subject to the institutional structure of the DDR programme (Munive, 2014: 336-350). Post-DDR integration can be equally uncertain. Short-term training and education packages result in reintegrating ex-combatants into poverty and marginality. Few ex-combatants are able to apply their newly minted skills due to a lack of demand and depressed market conditions (McMullin, 2004). Lack of integration in the post-demobilization phase, does not necessarily entail re-recruitment into armed activities but can create cohorts that remain on the margins on society, at risk of remobilization into violence. Mats Uta (2003; 2005) has framed the problem facing ex-combatants as one of re-marginalisation and not reintegration. In spite of DDR participation, integration can be a complex issue for combatants who are socialized into violence (Bøas and Bjørkhaug, 2011; Ferme, 2001; Hoffman, 2011). For example, demobilized combatants in Sierra Leone rejected rural life, and gerontocratic values after the war, choosing urban hustling and unemployment over life under the control of elders in the impoverished countryside (Bolten, 2012: 497).

The fifth choice is “Not participating in DDR, unintegrated and re-recruited”. In Sierra Leone and Liberia, surveys have indicated that 10-15 percent of ex-combatants opted not to participate in DDR at all (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007: 549). The role of DDR type benefits in inducing ex-combatants to reject militancy is often weak. It is more appealing to younger ex-combatants that lack training and education, have few family or kinship connections and require a new post-war support network. Foot soldiers depend on senior commanders for access into the programme. DDR benefits therefore operate as a ‘pay off’ mechanism that may not encourage all ex-combatants to abandon violence. Mid-level commanders can be among the most difficult group to reintegrate. Often disappointed with reintegration benefits on offer, they are likely to use organizational skills and wartime networks to engage in a range of illegal economic activities, crime as well as remobilization of former comrades into new conflicts. DDR rewards can even help the political economy of war to remain intact by providing commanders with more capital to fund their illicit businesses or to remobilize clients into new conflict formations (Jennings, 2008: 40-41).

The sixth choice is “Not participating in DDR, re-recruited then deserting in favour of civilian life”. DDR participation, post-war integration and re-recruitment are largely determined by context and by ex-combatant attitudes towards insecurity, and the use of violence. While the securitization of reintegration means that ex-combatants are presented as having only violent rationalities (motivated to and by violence), and violence is asserted to be always and readily available to ex-combatants as soon as he or she encounters an obstacle along the path to reintegration (McMullin, 2013b: 247-249). In reality, ex-combatants are not inherently violent, they are professionals of violence, socialized, and trained into the use of violence. How they apply or refrain from such a technical or organizational skill depends on anticipated returns linked to a given context. It is also linked to psychological and behavioral aspects of individual disengagement from crime and militancy. Disillusionment arising from incongruence between the initial ideals and fantasies that shape a person’s initial involvement, physical burn out, changing personal priorities, and lack of fit with the new leadership have been cited as important reasons for disengagement (Oppenheim et al., 2015: 794-823).

Predicting Choice: Relating Agency, Influences and Outcomes

Ex-combatant choices do not take shape in a vacuum. Ex-combatants resist violence or decide to engage in it because of a complex of enabling and inhibiting factors that operate across structural and individual level considerations. Previous research on militancy, crime and ex-combatant recidivism identify these factors variously as ‘push and pull’ or ‘restraining and

driving forces' (Kaplan and Nussio, 2016: 1-30). In this research, six types of enabling and inhibiting factors are considered. These include **enabling factors** such as the pursuit of material gains, loyalty and commitment, excitement and adventure seeking, leadership, peer pressure, security and identity related considerations. **Inhibiting factors** include war-weariness, trauma and injury, regret and feeling cheated, death and loss, family and future plans.

Factors such as security and identity can be related to rational types of agency. The search for protection in a context of broader insecurity encourages a cost-benefit rationalization of the decision to re-enlist, both for the immediate and future contexts. Whether it is a weak post-conflict state that is unable to provide security, or an incomplete dissolution of command and control structures of armed groups that have an interest in continuation of war (due to economic profiteering), structural insecurity has important implications for the personal security of ex-combatants (Walter, 1997: 335-364). Protection from targeted attacks by security forces, local communities or former adversaries in a context of broader insecurity can encourage ex-combatants to rejoin armed groups (Kalyvas and Kocher, 2007: 177-216). It can also discourage combatants from demobilizing formally to protect their true identity.

It is anticipated that security and identity in the context of ex-combatant agency encourages the choice of reintegration without DDR support through the exercise of rational agency. First hand experiences of violence and its resulting harm can encourage ex-combatants to draw up alternative future plans that are non-violent. The desire to create a family, build a normal career, or settle down into civic life, are identified as pull factors that can change life priorities in studies on militant disengagement, reinforcing their importance as influence variables (Alonso, 2011). These factors are conducive to the choice of reintegration as a rational decision. Rational agency presupposes deliberation over long-term consequences of any action. In the context of ex-combatant choices, reintegration involves a choice of self-preservation, security and stability.

Rational agency, would suggest that the benefits of reintegration, even without DDR support is likely to enhance the goal of safety, and security. Rejoining an armed group can present the opportunity for immediate security but is unlikely to contribute towards long-term stability. Identity issues are equally influential in encouraging the choice of reintegration over re-recruitment. Ex-combatant identity can have peacetime value. Combat skills can present ex-combatants opportunities to find employment in a new security sector. Even when formal employment is closed to ex-combatants, informal roles as vigilantes, private security contractors or as community policing groups can provide employment, and purpose.

Factors such as excitement, adventure-seeking, material gains and peer pressure notwithstanding their contextual variations are enabling in nature, in that they can encourage ex-combatant re-recruitment motivated by immediate gains. Tactical agency can encourage participation in DDR programmes as a form of material gain, as much as it can trigger re-recruitment into new, armed formations in search of economic rewards linked to combat. Peer pressure, proximity and association are important pull factors. Ex-combatants who fought on the same side often constitute a distinct social group. Ex-fighters from the same faction may continue to fraternize long after leaving their armed units. These social networks mirror pre-existing command structures and create strong horizontal links that positively affects the opportunity to resume fighting (Themnér, 2013). Ex-combatants that formally demobilize, return to home communities, and reintegrate into civic roles, may still return to arms when called upon by previous comrades, due to a range of social, material and behavioral considerations.

Excitement and adventure seeking can encourage re-enlistment through an exercise of tactical agency. Child soldiers have been documented to actively seek out membership of armed groups in search of the excitement and adventure associated with soldiering. In post-conflict societies, ex-combatants become part of urban gangs involved in crime, narcotics and the like to continue with a lifestyle involving alcohol, drugs, and violence that mimics combatant habitus. Ex-combatants influenced by excitement and adventure seeking, are unlikely to participate in DDR programmes. They remain integrated within their combatant networks and therefore unintegrated in the context of wider community and civic relationships.

Reflective agency manifests at a cognitive level, resulting in a temporal shift in the psychological orientation towards violence. War-related severe stress, even though transient indelibly changes an individual on various levels (Schaal and Elbert, 2006: 95-105). Regret over the loss of education, sexual exploitation, false promises regarding future rewards are some of the practical and moral factors that can deter re-recruitment (Blattman and Annan, 2010; Schafer, 1998). Reflective agency can also be linked to temporality in terms of age and changes in status (Thornberry, Huizinga and Loeber, 1995). Return to school, to one's family or even the discovery of alternative belief systems, can enable ex-combatants to establish new identities, belief structures and social relationships. In terms of outcomes, reflective agency can encourage participation in DDR programmes, and reintegration among those who experience war-weariness, regret and feelings of being cheated.

Reflective agency operates differently for those who experience rise in leadership ranks. The ability to shape the direction of group strategies is associated with positive combat

experiences (Fuest, 2008: 201-224). The desire to regain wartime leadership privileges and associated benefits (status, money, followers, friends, and access to political power) can encourage ex-combatants to rejoin armed conflicts. Equally, capable soldiers with proven leadership skills are more likely to be approached both by entrepreneurs of violence and by their subordinates to remobilize and regroup under favorable conditions.¹

Death, loss, trauma and injury are associated with moral agency. Death of a loved one can weaken the desire to continue fighting as can witnessing death at close quarters (Winkler, 2010: 13-14). On a cognitive level, traumatic experiences can shatter the most fundamental beliefs about safety, trust and self-esteem, creating instability and psychological incoherence in an individual's internal and external worlds (Berg et al., 1998: 35-47). Disability caused by injury can further enhance dependency on others, reduce chances of finding employment and create negative relationships with partners due to physiological and esteem related issues (Lord and Stein, 2015: 277-292).

Under the influence of factors associated with moral agency, ex-combatants may readjust their value system in order to make it in accordance with their new patterns of behavior. Ex-combatants may choose to desert, or stay away from formal demobilization processes. Studies on militant disengagement suggest that from a moral perspective, changing violent behavior is more important than changing radical attitudes (Horgan, 2009). Based on such an analysis of the interaction between agency, influences and outcomes, it is possible to predict that rational agency can lead to Choices One and Two, namely, "reintegration into civilian life both with and without DDR support". Tactical agency can lead to Choices Three and Five; "participating in DDR, re-recruited but not unintegrated, and, not participating in DDR, unintegrated and re-recruited respectively". Reflective agency can lead to Choice Four, "participating in DDR, remaining unintegrated but not re-recruited," and moral agency can lead to Choice Six, "not participating in DDR, re-recruited then deserting" (Table 2).

[Table 2 here]

Conclusion

Ex-combatants can exercise various types of agency to choose between re-recruitment and reintegration. Ex-combatants act tactically in choosing re-recruitment, while they may be more strategic in choosing reintegration. Rational agency assumes that individuals exercise a certain level of deliberation and awareness of the meaning and consequences of their actions and choices whether it favors reintegration or re-recruitment. Moral and reflective forms of

agency encourage non-violent life-paths and assist with successful reintegration. In order for ex-combatant agency to be taken seriously as a conceptual category and as an analytical lens, it needs to be applied within reintegration practice. It needs to be seen as more than a phenomenon that is tactical and reactive, in line with established assumptions about ex-combatant behavior. To be successful in design and implementation, reintegration discourses need to step back and observe the agency of its participants. Ex-combatant capacity for survival and for rebuilding civilian lives with or without formal support can be a powerful angle to approach this cohort. Acknowledging their capacity to resist violence can help policy makers harness their positive agency especially into security sector reform processes. It can also help international actors to transcend the tick box nature of DDR programmes.

Future research should be conducted in other settings with similar scope conditions to test the theory of ex-combatant agency. Some areas of inquiry include for example, investigating how ex-combatants from different warring factions embrace opportunities to become part of a new national army or police? While the current focus of the literature on peace building is on the process of inclusion and exclusion of different groups in a post-conflict security sector and associated grievances, gaps exist in applying an agency framework to understand the consequences of such inclusion or exclusion. The application of social cognitive approaches can be further refined, through the use of longitudinal studies that map shifts in ex-combatant behavior beyond the immediate years of reintegration support. Understanding how individuals respond to changes in the structural environment characterized by post-conflict peacebuilding and security sector interventions can help identify alternative mechanisms to encourage positive agency and integration among ex-combatant groups beyond short-term reintegration support.

The findings from this study will have three important contributions. First, through a critical engagement with the normative assumptions underlying core DDR terminologies namely, 'ex-combatant', 'reintegration' and 're-recruitment', the study contributes to the scholarship around the design and effectiveness of DDR as a security practice. Second, by highlighting the contextual nuances surrounding the lived experiences of children and young people, the politics surrounding the militarisation and demilitarisation of children and youth is exposed. Third, by drawing on insights from social cognitive theory, a new typology on ex-combatant agency is developed in ways that allow ex-combatant behaviour to be studied through the prism of structural, individual and contextual level factors. Through its overall engagement with the politics of DDR as a security practice and by approaching ex-combatant agency as an exercise in limited choice the study advances a critical security studies agenda in the study of ex-combatant reintegration.

These findings will enable us to think and engage with ex-combatants and child soldiers in ways that avoid falling into commonplace assumptions that do not accommodate the heterogeneity of lived experience. Critical social inquiry and an ethnographic framing around the motivations and choices of child soldiers and youth combatants can help dispel myths that endure in public discourse and, to a somewhat lesser but still significant extent, in scholarly and activist literatures. The recent critiques of moral panics regarding ‘youth bulges’ highlight the starkly different approaches put forward to tackle the perceived insecurity and threat from youthful cohorts. In the United Kingdom, military service has been argued by some to be the solution to the ‘threat’ presumed to inhere in the under-served young male demographic. This stands in stark contrast to the demobilisation and reintegration into civilian life that dominates the discourses around child soldiers in the global South. A postcolonial or critical race perspective might aid further consideration of this question.

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